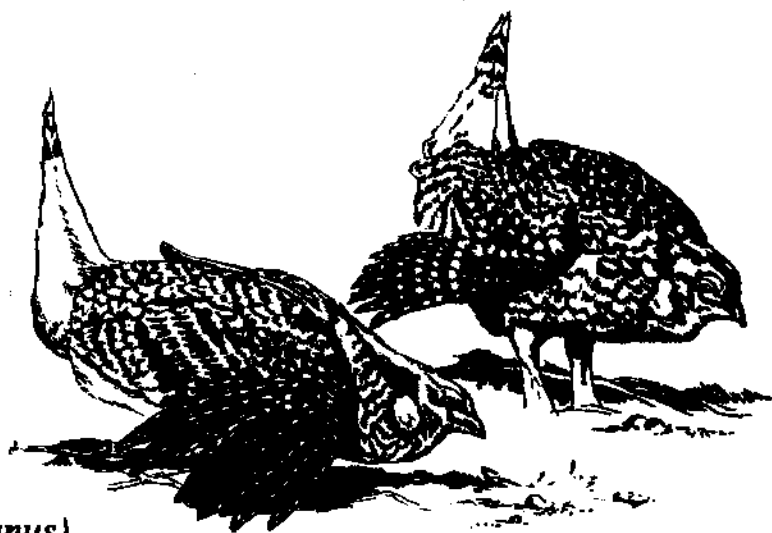


****ATTENTION****

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(Tympanuchus phasianellus columbianus)

COLUMBIAN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE

RANGE

The Columbian sharp-tailed grouse is found from north-central British Columbia and western Montana south to eastern Washington, Idaho, north-eastern Utah and Colorado. The bird was extirpated from portions of its former range, which included California, Oregon and Nevada.

WASHINGTON DISTRIBUTION

In Washington, sharp-tailed grouse live along the edges of native bunchgrass prairies of eastern Washington (Lincoln, Douglas and Okanogan counties).

HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Columbian sharp-tailed grouse occur in semi-desert scrub and mixed grasslands, at elevations ranging from 123' to 3,600'. Remnant native habitats

containing a mixture of native grasses and brush are most likely to support sharp-tailed grouse. Optimum habitats are composed of a combination of grass, shrub and shrub/grass communities, rather than pure stands of any of these community types. Edges between shrubby and grassy cover types are especially important to this species.

Sharp-tailed grouse feed primarily on plant materials, however insects are also consumed in spring and summer. Grass blades and flower parts are important foods in spring and summer. Winter foods consist of buds, twigs and catkins from shrubs and trees; persistent fruits such as chokecherry (*Prunus sp.*), serviceberry (*Amelanchier sp.*), and snowberry (*Symphoricarpos sp.*) are also important.

Bunchgrass clumps and woody vegetation are used by

sharp-tails for cover from weather and predators and for visual isolation of individuals during feeding, resting and nesting activities. Winter roosts are established in snow burrows when snow is deep, however woody vegetation is used when snow is shallow or crusted. Riparian areas, conifer forest edges and woody ravines also provide important cover for grouse throughout the year.

The breeding season for Columbian sharp-tailed grouse begins in early April, with young dispersed by mid-July. Male birds gather at display grounds, or "leks," following receding snow cover when fall-grown forb and grass foods become available. Individual birds return to traditional leks and defend the same territories used in previous years. Territory sizes may range from 46 square feet to 558 square feet, with typically eight to 12 males

present at a lek site. Males display to attract females, performing a ritualized courtship dance.

Sharp-tailed grouse leks are likely to occur in areas of low or sparsely distributed, mixed vegetation. Washington leks are established on barren areas with little or no vegetation within native bunchgrass prairies. Nests are built on the ground, and may be located beneath a clump of bunchgrass, and within 10' of brushy cover. Grasslands interspersed with trees and shrubs and wetter areas such as creek bottoms are used as brooding habitat.

LIMITING FACTORS

The major limiting factor for sharp-tailed grouse is the availability of undisturbed native grass and shrub communities.

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Activities such as converting native grasslands to cropland, overgrazing, loss of brush and bud producing plants from draws have probably caused the decline of Columbian sharp-tailed grouse in Washington. Consequently, remaining native grasslands, shrub communities, and the edges between these plant associations should be preserved where sharp-tailed grouse occur.

Brush, shrubs and trees growing in draws and creek beds provide buds, which are important winter food items for sharp-tailed grouse. "Budding" plants should not be removed from draws used by grouse. Fences erected around draws in grazing areas will prevent cattle from damaging "budding" habitat. A buffer of natural vegetation around the perimeters of draws should be left in areas where crops are planted.

Over-grazing of vegetation causes a decline in sharp-tailed grouse nesting and brooding habitat and should be avoided. However, light grazing on a seasonal basis may enhance sharp-tailed grouse habitat by providing clumps of vegetative cover and an assortment of grass and forb foods. A live-stock density of three acres per animal-unit/month is recommended.

Sharp-tailed grouse are susceptible to disturbance around leks, particularly during the breeding season. Human presence causes male birds to temporarily desert the leks, while females are bothered by human presence, loud noises, leashed dogs and parked vehicles. Continued disturbance over several seasons can bring about population declines. Therefore, site visits, blasting, road construction and operating farm

machinery should be restricted at or near leks from April 1 to May 31.

Insecticides used in grasshopper control programs have been shown to cause behavioral alterations or death in wild sharp-tailed grouse. Insecticides and herbicides should not be applied to areas where Columbian sharp-tailed grouse are known to occur. Aerial applications of pesticides should not occur on surrounding lands if drifting of the materials into grouse habitat is likely.

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